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COLONIAL LINGUISTICS

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■ **Abstract** Academic knowledge of human linguistic diversity owes much to descriptions written, over four centuries ago, under the aegis of European colonial regimes around the world. This comparative review considers a small part of that body of linguistic descriptive work relative to its conditions of production: authorial interests that animated such writings, ideological and institutional milieux that enabled and shaped them, and the authoritative character they took on as natural symbols of colonial difference. European technologies of literacy enabled missionary and nonmissionary linguistic work that resulted in representations of languages as powerful icons of spiritual, territorial, and historical hierarchies that emerged in colonial societies. As descriptions of languages traveled from exotic colonial peripheries to European metropoles, they came under the purview of comparative philology. This disciplinary precursor to modern linguistics helped to legitimize colonial linguistic projects and legislate colonial difference on a global scale.

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century, Europeans wrote about alien languages that they encountered in pursuit of their diverse colonial interests. The result is a group of writings with disparate geohistoric origins that can be gathered under the rubric of "linguistics" only if each is thought to be grounded in common presuppositions about languages' writability and so also about patterned relations between meanings of talk, on one hand, and speech sounds or their orthographic counterparts on the other. Such presuppositions make plausible the expository strategies that helped colonial (proto)linguists move from time-bound human speech to language objects, abstractable in textual form from communities and verbal conduct. However, the work of writing these descriptions was done in hugely different "landscapes in the colonial world" (Breckenridge & van der Veer 1993), so attention is required here to these diverse conditions of production (Fabian 1985): extrinsic interests and political circumstances that licensed authors' alien presences among speakers, institutional grounds, and readerships for their descriptive work, and so on.

"Colonialism" is a rubric for hugely different exploitative purposes, institutional configurations, and modes of subordination; so the work of linguistic description

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done under the aegis of various colonial regimes needs to be considered with an eye to conditions that enabled it and social interests inscribed in it. Metalinguistic representations of alien speech, framed in languages more familiar to Europeans, recurringly made possible the figuring of language among the "cultural and representational feature[s] of colonial authority" (Cooper & Stoler 1997a, p. 18). To address these joined concerns—how representations of linguistic structure and colonial interests shaped and enabled each other—I center this review on collateral uses of these descriptive projects and their enabling assumptions, such that language difference could become a resource—like gender, race, and class—for figuring and naturalizing inequality in the colonial milieux (Breckenridge & van der Veer 1993, Gal & Irvine 1995, Irvine & Gal 2000). In this respect, the writings of linguists can be scrutinized as other colonial texts by historians, cultural anthropologists, literary theorists, and others have been. Insofar as the label "colonial linguistics" covers texts that reduced complex situations of language use and variation to unified written representations, it can be considered here under a broadly ideological profile (Woolard & Schieffelin 1994, Kroskrity 2000).

Actions of colonial agents outran their own intent, and colonial linguistic work likewise had uses and effects beyond those foreseen or intended by its authors. It was grounded in institutions and animated by interests that legitimized simple views of enormously complex situations and that licensed what were often "fantasmatic representation[s] of authoritative [linguistic] certainty in the face of spectacular ignorance" (Greenblatt 1991, p. 89). At issue here are the sources of such "certainty," because they are bound up with enabling ideologies about hierarchies of languages and peoples on colonial territory and in precolonial pasts.

If this review were restricted to linguistic descriptive work in peripheral colonial locales, to the exclusion of the study of language in European centers of colonial power, it would effectively reproduce the notion that colonialism was a project created by but not shaping of European political cultures. Writings on the political economy of the world system (Wallerstein 1974) and postcolonial political culture (e.g. Stoler 1989) suggest the need to consider colonial linguistic writings here with an eye to the colonial infrastructures that enabled their circulation between peripheries and European centers. For this reason, European philology has a place here as an academic venue that was central for legislating colonial and human differences, and so for mediating the broadest "tensions of empire" (Cooper & Stoler 1997b).

ORTHOGRAPHY AND ORTHODOXY

Greenblatt (1991, p. 88) observes of sixteenth century accounts of travels in the New World that their authors aimed to reduce the "opacity of the eye's objects . . . [human and natural] . . . by rendering them transparent signs." As narrative projects, they are subject to critical interpretive scrutiny. However, the transient opacity of alien talk required a semiotically distinct deployment of European writing; to be

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rendered "transparent," its speech sounds had to be fixed and made representable with familiar orthographic conventions. "[B]onding stranger denisons of other tongues 'to the rules of our writing'"—called "enfranchisement" by Mulcaster, a sixteenth century writer whom Greenblatt quotes (1991, p. 89)—was the only alternative to "kidnapping languages" through the living bodies of speakers. Such re-presentations of alien speech, at once iconic and narratively framed, served to mitigate linguistic otherness in (proto)colonial encounters.

Four centuries later, Kenneth Pike (1947) subtitled *Phonemics*, his well-known, barely postcolonial linguistics text, "a technique for reducing languages to writing." His use of the word "technique" signals a scientific framing of acoustic and articulatory properties of speech and a scientific goal of developing empirically accurate, isomorphic mappings of artificial written symbols onto speech sounds. Samarin (1984, p. 436) sees this self-consciously modern, scientific enterprise as a part and culmination of colonialism's "experimental civilization," a discipline that developed as Europeans dealt with alien ways of speaking in colonial situations and that provided experimental tests for Europeans' ideas about language. Colonial milieux counted as arenas for applying techniques of science, at least in some eyes, for the good of humankind.

However, assumptions about the status of linguistics as a science elide enduring, widespread links between the work of linguistic description and Christian proselytizing, nowhere more evident than in Pike's own comments on his object of study, phonemics, as "a control system blessed of God to preserve tribes from chaos" (quoted in Hvalkof & Aaby 1981, p. 37). As a leading figure of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the single largest organization of linguists and missionaries working in the world today, he can be considered a postcolonial American successor to colonial-era missionizing linguists. This continuity between colonial past and postcolonial present is very clear in missionary linguistic work now ongoing in marginal communities all over the world, with collateral goals and effects both obvious and intimate (Schieffelin 2000). Late colonial era missionaries left another sort of mark on contemporary linguistic scholarship if, as Gaeffke (1990) asserts, disproportionate numbers of their offspring are now scholars of Oriental languages.

Colonial linguistics needs to be framed here, then, as a nexus of technology (literacy), reason, and faith and as a project of multiple conversion: of pagan to Christian, of speech to writing, and of the alien to the comprehensible. So too missionaries' linguistic work is salient here less for its empirical value than for its role in the assertion of spiritual dominion through language. Samarin observes (1984, p. 436–37) of religious doxa and linguistic descriptive practice that Protestant missionaries in Africa tended to be better linguists than Catholics. Whether or not this observation holds for nineteenth-century sub-Saharan Africa, it lacks portability to contexts such as early colonial Latin America, where early Catholic missionaries' exhaustive linguistic work has proven to be of enduring value (see Lockhart 1991). The shaping effects of religious doxa thus need to be considered in relation to the broader social biographies of missionaries—what Samarin calls

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their "cultural baggage"—together with extrinsic local conditions. When Samarin notes, for instance, that French missionaries in Africa tended to be inferior linguists to their German and Flemish counterparts, he tacitly alludes to effects of nationalist ideologies on linguistic work. Meeuwis (1999a,b) addresses this issue more directly in his comments on ethnonationalist sentiment and conflict among French and Flemish missionaries in the Congo in the mid-nineteenth century. He suggests (1999a, p. 385) that a Herderian "ideology of the natural" left its traces in missionary linguistic description and policy. Such examples testify to the need for caution in reading historiographies of missionary linguists that reproduce assumptions about the autonomy of religious faith, and consequently elide powerful shaping contingencies (Bendor-Samuel 1944, Hanzeli 1969, Hovdhaugen 1996, Wonderly & Nida 1963).

Rafael's compelling study (1993) of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Spanish descriptions of Tagalog, written in the early, tribute-based colony of the Philippines, offers a useful entree to the broadest theological and semiotic grounds of missionary linguistic work. He foregrounds the hierarchy of languages and the "politics of translation" that grounded Latin's double significance as sanctioner and enabler of Catholic missionary descriptive work. As a Truth-language, metonymically bound up with the transcendent message it conveyed (Anderson 1991), Latin legitimized these descriptive projects both as means and ends for propagating faith. As the paradigm of written language, Latin was a descriptive resource: an ideal icon, template, and source of analytic categories for written (mis)representations of Tagalog speech. Castillian mediated this theolinguistic hierarchy as the language of secular authority, used to frame discursively the "reduction" of Tagalog to writing. A hierarchy of languages was legitimized by the exchange it enabled, as written appropriation of Tagalog speech served the production of written religious materials in that "same" language.

Rafael argues that a shift in Tagalog voice and subjectivity was engendered by Spanish colonialism and diagnoses this shift from missionary linguists' rejection of the native Tagalog script, *baybayin*. This is evidence for him of that script's dangerous elusiveness for missionaries' "totalizing signifying practices," owing to phonetic indeterminacies of *baybayin*, which presumably permitted a passing over of "sense in favor of sensation" (1993, p. 53). Rafael's move from orthographic convention to positioned subjectivity is influenced by Derrida's grammatology, but has earlier antecedents in, for instance, Herder's reading of the emblematic character of Hebrews from their orthography's phonetic indeterminacies (Herder 1966). On the other hand, seemingly analogous indeterminacies of Arabic orthography do not preclude a kind of Derridean "metaphysics of presence," at least in Messick's view (1993).

Alternatively, *baybayin's* marginal status might be considered with an eye to Spanish missionaries' ignorance of contexts and genres that may have served to disambiguate such orthographic ambiguities in use. Herzfeld (1987, pp. 51–52) observes in this vein that context dependence of language is a recurring mark of subordinate otherness in literate European eyes. Missionaries' blindness to generic

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shapings of *baybayin* literacy practices (Hanks 2000) would have deprived them of access to contextual factors that made it possible to disambiguate use of the writing.

For Mignolo (1994), analogous readings of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spanish missionary confrontations with Mayan speech and "writing without words" are overly parochial. Arguing against the grain of received opinion on early Spanish humanist thought (K. Woolard, personal communication), he traces political influence back from that peripheral colonial locale to contemporaneous debates on the Iberian peninsula about political and theological relations between Castillian and Latin. However, Mignolo's broader account (1995) resonates broadly with Rafael's theosemiotic critique of the "normativity" (Fabian 1986, p. 78) that was crucial for Spanish missionary linguistic work. In both, Latin texts licensed descriptive deployment of Latin categories, grounding the division of linguistic descriptive labor in which written European vernaculars mediated between pagan tongues and sacred writ.

LINGUISTIC TERRITORIALITY

In the nineteenth century, colonial regimes promoted invasive plantation and extractive economies, creating milieux in which the linguistic descriptions that missionaries wrote had recurring motivations, uses, and effects. I foreground here the naturalizing force such linguistic descriptions lent to colonial categories of social difference and their saliences as models of and for ethnocultural identities. Historiographic reviews of colonial linguistics in sub-Saharan Africa and insular Southeast Asia recurringly point to the capacity of linguistics to concretize and normalize the territorial logic of power exercised by English (Alberto 1997; Carmody 1988; Chimhundu 1992; Fardon & Furniss 1994b; Giliomee 1989; Harries 1988, 1989; Pennycook 1998; Samarin 1984, 1989; Tomas 1991), French and Belgian (Fabian 1985, 1986; Irvine 1993, 1995; Joseph 2000; Meeuwis 1999a,b; Raison-Jourde 1977; Samarin 1984, 1989; Yates 1980), and Dutch colonial states (Anderson 1991, Giliomee 1989, Groeneboer 1997, Kipp 1990, Kuipers 1998, Moriyama 1995, Smith-Hefner 1989, Steedly 1996).

Whatever their sectarian differences, missionaries were obliged to accede to the geographic divisions of spiritual labor enforced by the colonial states that accorded to each an exclusive jurisdiction. These preestablished boundaries, crucially distinct from frontiers (Fardon & Furniss 1994a), were understood to be categorical and not permissive of interpenetrating influences. In this way colonial rule reproduced on smaller scales European modes of territoriality—a "strategy for controlling people and their relationships by delimiting and asserting control over geographic area" (Sack 1986, p. 19)—which assumed bounded linguistic *cum* cultural homogeneity among national citizenries within sovereign European states (Balibar 1991, Gellner 1983). Anderson (1991) takes up this ideological commonality in his discussion of technologies of colonial surveillance.

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"Territoriality" in this sense differs from Mignolo's use of the term (1995, p. 66) for "a sense of being and belonging beyond the administrative and legal apparatus by which the land is owned by a handful of people and the nation symbolically construed by its intellectuals." For present purposes, following accepted sociolinguistic usage (Gumperz 1971), I refer to Mignolo's territoriality—which I take to be the extrainstitutionally and interactionally grounded dimension of sociality—as "community."

Colonial states and missionary jurisdictions thus shared a territorial logic that was similarly inscribed in colonial linguistic work, presupposing mappings of monolithic languages onto demarcated boundaries (cf. Urciuoli 1995). Within those bounded confines were conceived to be ethnolinguistically homogeneous groups that were localized, and naturalized, as "tribes" or "ethnicities."

Assumptions about the naturalness of monoglot conditions helped Europeans grapple with bewildering linguistic diversity, which they could frame as a problematic, Babel-like condition to be subjected to regulation (Fabian 1986) or balkanization (Calvet 1974). Historiographies of missionaries show how the linguistic descriptions they authored, augmented by print literacy, served as a means for powerfully yet intimately "[c]onceptualizing, inscribing, and interacting with [colonialized people] on terms not of their own choosing" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, p. 15).

Prior to the British colonial presence at the turn of the previous century, what later became southern Rhodesia and then Zimbabwe was spanned by a graded continuum of Shona dialects. By 1930, Protestant and Catholic missions had produced three mutually distinct languages within their territorially delimited spheres of spiritual influence. Though Jesuit and Trappist Mariannhill missionaries shared the Catholic faith, they produced languages—Zezuru and Chimanyika, respectively—sufficiently different that removal of territorial boundaries between the two missionary districts in 1923 engendered active resistance among converts. Methodist, Episcopal, and Anglican missionaries were able together to "create . . . rather than merely reflect . . . one specific dialect of Shona" (Ranger 1989, p. 127) because their spheres of influence were economically and geographically complementary (large-scale maize producers and smallholders, respectively). (See also Chimhundu 1992.)

Protestant missionary linguists of different sects also worked in bounded domains or "fields" of operation in the East Sumatran part of the Dutch East Indies empire in the late nineteenth century. They developed print-literate codifications of Karo and Toba, languages that were previously undistinguished but were soon to count as the clearest marks of ethnic differences up to the postcolonial Indonesian present (Kipp 1990, Steedly 1996). In retrospect, such missionary work appears as a kind religiously inspired language engineering that fits well, for instance, Haugen's account of the process of dialect selection, codification, elaboration, and dissemination that culminates in a national language (Haugen 1972).

Missions of conversion, colonial territoriality, and print literacy thus converged in the work of colonial linguists who produced powerful icons of ethnolinguistic

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sharedness, identity markers that became central items for colonial "cultural package[s]." (Vail 1989, p. 11) The products of missionary linguistic work could be multiply naturalizing: emblematic of communities, assimilable as individual conduct, and mappable onto colonial territory. Henson (1974) observes that work by missionary linguists in British colonial Africa did not differ in kind from that of professional linguists. However, it could subserve the territorial and administrative logic of colonial states even if it was animated by utopian visions of spiritually and linguistically unified communities.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC HIERARCHIES

As missionary linguists proselytized and educated, antecedent social formations came to be supplanted by new ethnolinguistic groupings that were consonant with broader projects of conversion. The spread of the missionary lingua franca that became nativized as Tsonga, for instance, accompanied the breakdown of complex, interpenetrating translocal linkages of chieftanship and kinship (Harries 1988, 1989). So too missionary-constructed, "pared-down" Karo came into ascendance over its "dialectal" variants as a reified, territorially grounded mark of Karo-ness. Ethnicity progressively superseded antecedent webs of kinship characterized by social asymmetry, defined and restricted forms of social intercourse, and established rights and obligations (Steedly 1996).

However, missionary work that effaced precolonial social formations also gave rise to new, language-linked socioeconomic stratification that subserved political and economic agendas of the colonial states that sanctioned their work. Their new languages were spoken first by converts who were also members of literate proto-bourgeoisies, salariats, or literate colonialized compradores (Calvet 1974; Fabian 1985, 1986; Harries 1989; Samarin 1989). Emergent sociolinguistic hierarchies involved class-like differences between social fractions, which grounded the process Calvet (1974) calls "glottophagy," as missionary-supported forms of speech subsumed their "degenerate" variants.

These hierarchies bear broad comparison with others in Europe, where literate, urban, bourgeoisies viewed peasants and workers at their own geopolitical, economic, and linguistic margins in similar ways (Calvet 1974, Mazrui 1975, Pennycook 1998, Raison-Jourde 1977, Samarin 1989). Their images of languages and speakers a bit closer to home—on the Celtic fringe of Great Britain (Lauzon 1996) for instance, or at various of France's territorial peripheries (Weber 1976)—had broad parallels in the "grammars of difference" (Cooper & Stoler 1997a) that missionary linguists created along with grammars of foreign languages.

Ranger notes that though missionary linguistic work in southern Rhodesia was augmented by print literacy, it did not exert what Anderson calls the "vernacularizing thrust" of print capitalism, which helped to level prenational language hierarchies in Europe (Anderson 1991). Deployed outside a market-based system, it promoted instead a superposed codification, or model for speech, which

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indirectly contributed to the distinctiveness of an emergent, native, literate class. Harries (1989, p. 43) similarly characterizes print-mediated Tsonga's elite character in a colonially "imagined community," noting that it defined a linguistic hierarchy that lent dominant symbolic force to newly "spatial" (i.e., territorial) political identities.

Insofar as missionary centers offered unequal access to print-mediated forms of speech, they engendered differential senses of language-linked identities. As socioeconomic conditions came to confer more value on some forms of linguistic and symbolic capital than others (Bourdieu 1991, Irvine 1989), those differences grew in salience for asserting or contesting colonial power. Largely undescribed and perhaps undescribable in the historiographic literature are the linguistic "microprocesses" that mediated these social changes, particulars of variation that would have stemmed from and been diagnostic of new hierarchies as they were internalized and resisted within and across emerging lines of class, territorial, and gender difference. In this respect, the broadest findings of variationist sociolinguistic research in contemporary Western societies (e.g., Labov 1972) provide grounds for speculation about complex dynamics of language and social identity at the most mundane levels of colonial influence.

At the same time, social effects of colonial linguistic work need to be framed under "macro" profiles of political and economic interest, which varied over time and space, from regime to regime. Dutch recognition of Sundanese as a language and ethnicity distinct from Javanese only came in the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, as a direct upshot of moves to train indigenous officials to administer a plantation economy (Moriyama 1995). Political cultural conditions led the Dutch to fear the effects of Christian missions in this largely Islamic area, and so they took a socially restricted linguistic interest in Sundanese and Javanese. The upshot was a colonial linguistics focused on noble elite usage, yielding print-mediated codifications that reinforced rather than undermined antecedent politico-symbolic hierarchies (Errington 1998).

Instructive in this regard is missionary linguistic work done in Madagascar under the aegis of a native ruler rather than a colonial regime. Prior to the ascendance of the French, linguists of the Protestant London Missionary Society described the Merina language and translated the Bible at the behest of King Radama I. Quick to grasp the potential significance of this work, he supported it with the labor of two hundred of his soldiers. The resulting English/Malagasy, Malagasy/English dictionary of 1829 was "a foreign scientific project, in the best tradition of English academies or German universities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Raison-Jourde 1977, p. 644). These missionaries invested an elite-but-local dialect with quasi-national significance, strengthening and affirming the royal center's territorial control over coastal peripheries. Raison-Jourde's acute description of this "scholarizing" project anticipates Bourdieu's economistic tropes of linguistic inequality (1991), tracing the elevation of new, codified linguistic norms and "laws of linguistic exchange." Print-mediated norms, licensed by the royal center, could be internalized by a newly literate Merina elite in the absence of a colonial

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regime. However, the emergence of those norms appeared to have exerted broadly analogous forces, creating inequality between varieties of the Merina language, class-like links to royal power, and the abstraction of linguistic conventions from the give and take of everyday life.

LINGUISTIC PICTURES OF PRECOLONIAL PASTS

It is no coincidence that Terence Ranger, historiographer of Rhodesian colonial linguistics discussed above, coedited a seminal collection of articles on invented traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). This scholarly connection helps to broach the enabling paradox of colonial linguistics noted by Fabian (1985, p. 78): It presupposed contemporary versions of "traditional culture" that had to be invented in order to be defended. To discuss languages as colonially invented traditions, I foreground here the kinds of purist ideologies (Shapiro 1989) that made linguistic diversity into a legitimizing resource for colonial missionaries' regulatory efforts "from above."

Primevalness and purity were convergent, overdetermined aspects of missionary language ideologies. The perceived primitivity of the communities they encountered resonated in the first place with Biblical narratives of (monolingual) Eden, and the theology of dispersal from (multilingual) Babel. Linguistic diversity within and across communities could be perceived in this way as a puzzling sign of barbarism (Mannheim 1991), whereas linguistic homogeneity in Pacific island communities summoned up paradisiacal images of noble, if savage, societies (Schutz 1994). By the same token, secular understandings of human and language origins (Herzfeld 1987) helped to legitimize colonial efforts to reduce linguistic diversity. I discuss below late nineteenth-century positivist visions of language that licensed attacks on linguistic heterogeneity as parts of the broader confrontation of European reason with non-European confusion (Harries 1989) and helped augment heroic images of colonial agents in imperial history (Herzfeld 1987, Breckenridge & van der Veer 1993).

Images of originary purity helped most practically to develop just-so stories justifying missionary efforts to describe and propagate unitary, territorially distinct languages. However tenuous the historical evidence for such narratives, they legitimized linguists' selections and marginalizations of dialects as more or less similar to imagined local ur-languages. Purism thus served the glottophagic "recovery" of missionary languages that subsumed their degenerate variants.

Herzfeld (1987, p. 116) points to the dependence of such purist visions of language not just on ur-forms' locations in a distant past, but also their relations to some perduring place. He thus emphasizes what Bakhtin would call the chronotopic character of language purism; the usefulness of such chronotopes for colonial linguistics can be illustrated with two brief examples. According to Harries (1988, 1989), Swiss missionaries in the Spelonken district of southeast Africa codified Tsonga, a language they attributed to people who in reality were fairly recent immigrants from neighboring regions. However, to "systematize" the language, as

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they understood it, required that they construct it first as a written lingua franca, which in turn required explanations of the great structural variation in speech that they encountered. They had recourse to a story of coastal invaders who brought foreign forms into Tsonga-speaking areas, sullying the language that had been a "great bond" between clans in past centuries.

Cast in the idiom of invasion and coercion—"framing movement as displacement, rather than exchange or transformation" (Fabian 1986, p. 78)—such narratives made the past into an ideological operator and legitimizing resource for colonialist reductions of linguistic complexity. This can be seen likewise in Irvine & Gal's report (2000) of the French military's legitimizing of their own invasion of the Senegambia area of West Africa. They viewed speakers of the Sereer language as resistant to Islam, unwarlike, and "primitive;" so they could diagnose the relatively widespread bilingualism in Wolof that they found among Sereer speakers as evidence that they had in the past fallen prey to that more aggressive, sophisticated, Islamic group. Bilingualism, diagnosed as the residue of past conquest and present tyranny, motivated the French answer to the call of their own *mission civilatrice*.

However, such interested constructions of linguistic history could be pirated by colonial subjects, because the transhistorical purity and autonomy of such images of language allowed them to traverse "ambiguous lines that divided [colonial] engagement from appropriation" (Cooper & Stoler 1997a, p. 6). Two striking examples are worth citing here. Tamil, learned and described by Europeans beginning in the mid-sixteenth century (James 1991), became an object of native purism in the late nineteenth century after publication of a missionary's comparative grammar that foregrounded its previously unrecognized structural distinctness from North Indian languages, including Sanskrit, the dominant religious Truth language. Newly understood as first among members of the newly named Dravidian language family, Tamil became a symbolic resource in struggles for cultural autonomy that crosscut ethnic, caste, and religious lines of difference. Segments of a colonialized society appropriated colonizers' versions of linguistic descent and mobilized them in politically fraught struggles over legitimate genres of liturgical speech (Appadurai 1981, Schiffman 1996).

Similarly "modular," identitarian conceptions of originary language are described by Mannheim as having been mobilized in colonial Peru (1991). In precolonial times the language of the Inka had been a lingua franca of empire, distributed in an "eggshell thin overlay" (1991, p. 16) over local Quechua languages. Its appropriation by Spaniards for administrative and missionizing purposes was apparently legitimized by chronotopic associations with Cuzco, that empire's former sacred political center. However, by the seventeenth century, a local *criolla* elite justified its claims to a privileged Andean identity by invoking that same chronotope, mobilizing a dominant ideology of language to assert their autonomy relative to a dominant colonial regime. Such examples show how the iconic character of such images of language made them susceptible to appropriation in unanticipated ways, across lines of sociopolitical interest.

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LANGUAGES OUT OF PLACE: DESCRIBING AND USING LINGUA FRANCAS

Colonial linguists helped to create such lingua francas—language varieties used non-natively, at least initially, across lines of native language difference—which they understood to be originary, "normal" versions of the languages whose degenerate variants they encountered. Conversely, colonial regimes created conditions that engendered creole languages, but which linguists largely ignored. Most obvious are what Chaudenson (1977) calls exogenous creole languages, which arose in "plantocratic" colonies, like those of the Caribbean. (An important exception to this generalization is Hugo Schuchardt, a linguist who also resisted dominant nineteenth-century philological conceptions of language discussed in the next section.)

This superficial paradox is symptomatic of the ideological marginality of lingua francas and creoles under colonial regimes. Notwithstanding their high utility, they lacked both originary chronotopes and native speakers. Similar paradoxes emerged along with the lingua francas used in Europeans' early commercial contacts in Africa. Sango, Lingala, and Ngbanda, crucial for business but low in prestige, went largely undescribed (Morrill 1997), partly because Europeans had only transient contact with them and partly because they were vehicular versions of native languages, in use between Africans more than between Europeans and Africans (Samarin 1989).

However, two lingua francas—Swahili in central Africa and Malay in the Dutch East Indies—can be considered here with an eye to the ways their anomalous statuses shaped them as objects of colonial linguistics. Both became objects of descriptive, codifying attention because of their growing salience for regimes that progressively penetrated territories and communities. Linguistic work on both offers evidence of underlying tensions between colonial needs for effective communicative praxis across lines of sociolinguistic difference on one hand, and colonial ideologies of languages as marks of identity on the other.

Fabian reads such a dilemma from the two distinct genres of descriptive writing about Swahili that developed in the nineteenth century (1985). One, grounded in military/economic realities of colonial exploitation, emphasized Swahili's simplicity and utility in context-bound, limited purpose communication, and resonated with assumptions about the primitivity of native thought. The other literature, serving the colonial civilizing mission, foregrounded Swahili's grammatical and lexical subtleties as evidence of its suitability, under European cultivation, for elevation to the status of a language of education for, among others, native missionaries.

This generic difference indexed a split that could only be recast as a hierarchical relation between literacy-linked "high" and oral "low" varieties of Swahili. Descriptively appropriated as colonialists' "own" language, Swahili could serve restricted purposes of communication across the colonial divide, while the oral varieties of subaltern communities were residualized or placed under erasure (Gal & Irvine 1995) for political purposes. Fabian reads colonial linguistic management of

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"high" Swahili as a strategy of containment, animated by French anxieties about its use in linguistically plural communities of Africans working in their mine-based economies.

Broadly similar social tensions accompanied Malay's double development in the Dutch East Indies. National insecurity in Europe, linguistic diversity in the archipelago, and conflicted politics of commerce and conversion led the Dutch to forgo use of their own language with natives (Groeneboer 1998; Hoffman 1973, 1979). As a plantation economy superceded trade, colonialists had increased need for a medium of administrative communication across lines of territorial and linguistic difference. The upshot was the elevation of Malay, a lingua franca that had been in use throughout the area prior to Europeans' arrival in the sixteenth century. As it became an object of colonial linguistic treatment, Malay's useful but low-status oral varieties were superceded by one that was determined on scientific/philological grounds (discussed later) to have been originary. Cut off historically from its (putative) native speakers in the Riau islands, but also institutionally from Islam and Arabic orthography, this invented variety of Malay was codified and disseminated by a special class of colonial language officers. (Teeuw 1971).

The upshot was another broadly diglossic split (Ferguson 1959) between the print-mediated "high" Malay of colonial administration and heterogeneous "low" varieties of "market Malay" (Hoffman 1973, 1979), which were important as the verbal glue binding segments of an economically and ethnolinguistically plural society. Even as dialects of "low" Malay became useful for a native literate community, their speakers found themselves in the curious position of speaking a language that, under ideological erasure (Gal & Irvine 1995, Irvine & Gal 2000) by the colonial regime, did not exist (Siegel 1997). The reification of this high/low split mirrored hardening racial and gender divisions in late nineteenth-century urban milieux. The mystique of science so important to Dutch colonialism's legitimacy operated in the sphere of language to create models of Malay that helped eliminate intermediate, "hybrid" speech that incorporated elements of Dutch (Maier 1997).

So colonial linguistic work enhanced the practical and ideological usefulness of both languages by hierarchizing and mediating problematic linguistic diversity. Languages became targets for anxieties projected out of contradictory demands of pragmatic colonial policy on one hand, and ideas about linguistic identity on the other.

ORIENTALISM AND COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY

As linguistic writings circulated beyond their originary colonial circumstances, they came to be read in Europe as windows on the most directly writable aspects of colonial otherness. They could also be brought together under the academic *cum* scientific purview of comparative philology, which developed contemporaneously with colonial penetration and domination of Africa, the Middle East, and

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parts of Asia over the nineteenth century. Colonial linguists provided grist for the mill of philological science, which in turn developed guiding images for the sorts of late nineteenth century colonial linguistic work sketched earlier. So comparative philology needs to be considered here as theoretically complementary to descriptive linguistics as practiced in disparate colonial locales.

The colonial origins of comparative philology—and, some would, say of modern linguistics more generally (Newmeyer 1986)—can be read from Sir William "Oriental" Jones' 1786 demonstration of structural commonalities between Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit (Aarsleff 1983). However, those affinities had been known to Europeans as early as the sixteenth century (Mukherjee 1968), and the comparative method that Jones demonstrated in rudimentary form had been developed independently by scholars in Europe (Gulya 1974). So it is worth foregrounding here instead the rhetorical force that accrued to his work as it traveled from India to a European readership.

Inscribed in Jones' *Third Discourse on the Hindus* can be seen two "modalities of colonial knowledge" (Cohn 1996). In an investigative modality he wrote as a judge who needed access to versions of native legal texts less "degenerate" than those initially available to him. This animated scholarship in the tradition of classical philology, aimed at recovering "pure," originary forms of texts. Though this project may have resonated with Hindu Puranic senses of a normative textual past (Rocher 1993), it primarily served and legitimized British rule.

However, the transposition of comparative strategies from the structure of texts to language systems took Jones' work into a historiographic modality. It demonstrated what Cohn calls the "ontological power" of "assumptions about how real social and natural worlds are constituted" (1996, p. 4). Jones accomplished this by transposing the strategies of classical philological scholarship from the domain of authored (and mistransmitted) texts to the domain of authorless linguistic structure. In this way, the comparative method opened up prehistory to empirical, inductive reasoning.

The ideological and political salience of this shift, and the enormous intellectual prestige it lent to the discipline of comparative philology that arose from it, can be characterized by adapting Chatterjee's observations (1986) on relativism and reason in (post)colonial encounters. Comparative philology brought into convergence the exercise of distinctively European reason and distinctively European power, allowing intellectual relations between European rationality and its (linguistic) object to be conflated with political relations between colonializing and colonialized peoples. This made philology central for scholarly figurings of colonial "dialectics of inclusion and exclusion" (Cooper & Stoler 1997a, p. 3), because it elided the gap between scientific study of abstract language structures and political control of human conduct. In this way the science of language (difference) simultaneously served to "transmute . . . polyglot agonies of Babel into a cult of transcendent European erudition" (Herzfeld 1987, p. 31).

Chatterjee's critique bears the imprint of Foucault's writing on power and knowledge, which influenced Said's earlier, formative account of philological and

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colonial interest in *Orientalism* (Said 1978; see also Said 1995). His critique of French comparative philology of Semitic languages is a powerful argument by example about the linguistic appropriation of Semitic (pre)history, which, purified by dint of (European) reason, could be returned in suitably domesticated form to its original inheritors. Said has been too influential for even those who resist his argument most to ignore (e.g., Gaeffke 1990) and his critique has been transposed effectively to other scenes of colonial philological work (Breckenridge & van der Veer 1993, Florida 1995). However, it has also been recurringly criticized in a manner reminiscent of Said's own criticism of Foucault (1978, p. 23) as having accorded too little attention to individual authors or texts (Ahmed 1992, Ludden 1993, Rocher 1993, Loomba 1998).

In the realm of (colonial) linguistic historiography, this recurring criticism points to the need to reread philological scholarship, paying explicit attention to political, intellectual, and biographical conditions of its production, as well as the ideologically salient metaphors it incorporates. Recent work under such a critical profile includes Irvine's work on the gendered politics of French philology of African languages (Irvine 1993, 1995), Joseph's study of language and scientific racism in relation to assimilationist and associationist colonial policies in French Indochina (Joseph 2000), and Olender's account (1992) of the philologist Renan's road from the seminary, through Semitic philology, to a "scientific" recuperation of the life of Christ.

The central, enduring philological trope that must be noted here is of language as organism, associated with the early, post-Biblical reflections on human origins of Herder and other German Romantics, who likewise were engaged in the crisis of national authenticity in Europe (Bauman & Briggs 2000, Blackall 1978). The trope powerfully informed images of language change in natural, entelechial processes of articulation, predetermined by languages' originary conditions and communities. This radically naturalized understanding of linguistic *cum* human difference grounded radically relativized views of historical change, what Fabian calls the allochronic "denial of coevalness" (1983, p. 30).

The spread of an axiomatic grammatical distinction between isolating, agglutinating, and inflecting methods of word formation, for instance, helped particularize and scientize studies of more or less "organic" language families. The Schlegel brothers, von Humboldt, and other early nineteenth-century philologists hypostasized these "empirical" categories to frame grammatical comparisons between languages in a natural-historical mode (Alter 1999, Davies 1998, Perceval 1987). Deployed in scientistic framings of grammatical structure, they served various and sometimes conflicting purposes, for instance, setting off Indo-European and Semitic languages from others (for Schlegel), or the former from the latter (for Renan, the linguistic theorist of scientific Racism) (Olender 1992).

Crucial here is the culmination of organismic tropes of language in Schleicher's diagrammatic, family tree (*stammbaum*) image of language change (Hoenigswald 1974, Calvet 1974) in the mid-nineteenth century. This image of branching descent

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was directly instrumental for inventing the kinds of linguistic pasts described earlier and for reifying colonial languages as unitized counters out of multilingual conditions of encounter (Silverstein 1997, p. 127). Worth noting here is Hoenigswald's observation (1974, p. 352) that the *stammbaum* model rehearses the classical philological image of textual transmission in the domain of language structure. This resonates with Wells' observations (1987) on the acmenistic character of comparative philology, because it contributed to visions of languages as decaying (along with their duly reified cultures) once past their apogees of development (see also Nielsen 1989, Perceval 1987), much as originary texts could only become corrupt through transmission.

Schleicher's empirically threadbare, Hegelian, gendered metaphysics of language is now largely forgotten. However, its professedly empirical, inductive framing of language difference served as a powerful license for global legislations of difference between the West and the Rest, and so between colonializing and colonialized peoples (Said 1995). The *stammbaum* model took on novel significance as used by Darwin to motivate his very different, evolutionary view of natural history and selection. Alter traces reciprocal influences between scientific thought about languages and species to show how, around 1870, the *stammbaum* model of orders and levels came to represent an "ascending staircase of social-cultural evolution" rather than the "tree of ethnological descent" (1999, p. 141; see also Fabian 1983, Burrow 1967, Jeffords 1987). The science of language then helped to naturalize evolutionism, making it an ideology that both legitimized colonialism generally, and enabled the work of colonial linguistics particularly.

POSTCOLONIAL POSTSCRIPT

Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1966), cited by many as the founding document of modern linguistic science, contains the observation that "there is no other field in which so many absurd notions, prejudices, mirages, and fictions have sprung up" (1966, p. 7). With an eye to the developments just noted, those errors might be viewed as much from an ideological as a "psychological viewpoint" (as Saussure puts it). So too, the thrust of Saussure's exposition—the radical autonomy of linguistic systems, the methodological priority of language states over mutations, the nonteleological character of language change, etc.—works quite directly against the grain of comparative philology as just sketched. Because it brackets such issues, Saussure's linguistic metier appears, in Blommaert's words, "to be immune to ideological influences" and integrable into any kind of political context (Blommaert 1999, p. 183). However, the saliences of this later version of linguistic science for late colonial and postcolonial linguistics need to be noted here.

Notwithstanding Saussure's stature, evolutionist biology shaped the thinking of many of his contemporaries in European and colonial milieux. Most notable may be Otto Jespersen's influential, positivist vision of language progress, shaped by

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both Spencer and Darwin (Jespersen 1894; see McCawley 1992). His metric for measuring inequality between languages, which emphasized conceptual precision and communicative efficiency (Jespersen 1922), was understood to measure accumulated effects of the operation of reason, social progress, and a "wise natural selection." Though reminiscent of Vico's vision of the progression of language from the senses to the intellect (see Pennycook 1998), Jespersen's argument was buttressed by rigorous descriptions of linguistic categories. The upshot was a newly scientized version of the difference between modern Europe (languages) and communities of speakers of less evolved languages.

The ideological salience of such metrics should not be underestimated. Euroamerican developmentalist writings on postcolonial language politics have had enduring effects on language policy and linguistic work in plural postcolonial nations (e.g. Fishman 1968). They presuppose viewpoints largely congruent with Jespersen's. Swahili's place in a Tanzanian "political linguistics" (Blommaert 1999), for instance, has been linked to developmentalist notions of efficiency and simplicity; Indonesian linguists have promoted their national language—successor to Malay, the lingua franca of the Dutch East Indies—in a similar mode, figuring the language in a teleological developmentalist ideology (Errington 1998, Heryanto 1985, Keane 1997). These two languages' lack of originary chronotopes, noted earlier, may throw special ideological weight onto developmentalist legitimations of their statuses as national languages.

A central leitmotif running through the different kinds of linguistic work reviewed here, as suggested by Fardon & Furniss, is a common objectifying thrust that simultaneously brackets "politically charged expository strategies" (1994a, p. 16) of language use, including the very strategies of descriptive objectification that those works presuppose.

Suitably objectified, languages could be powerful naturalizing instruments for colonial power. Their hegemonic status, Fardon & Furniss suggest, can be read from their endurance even in critiques of colonialism such as Asad's, who demonstrates the power-laden character of colonial-era ethnographic "cultural translation" with recourse to essentialized understandings of "weak" and "strong" languages (Asad 1986). The necessary but recurringly disguised incompleteness of such work can be linked with its doubly interested character, vis-à-vis immediate authorial concerns and broader ideological stances. However, it is not legitimate to read such partialness as evidence of the wholly illusory or fictive character of the structures represented in that work; the production of linguistic knowledge cannot always and everywhere be dissolved into the reproduction of colonial interest. If the texts that colonial linguists produced were not the transparent windows on human-yet-natural reality they were intended to be, they can nonetheless be read critically, with an eye to their metalinguistic strategies for framing talk's patterned character. Read in critically relativized ways, colonial linguistic texts can be more meaningful than their authors knew, moving beyond while also incorporating knowledge they provide—in some cases, the only knowledge available—about massively variable yet underlyingly human talk.

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